



2003

Legislative Report

For the 21st District

Senator Paull Shin



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E-mail Updates

Summer 2003

Dear Friends,

This year's legislative session was tough but meaningful under difficult circumstances. I am fairly pleased with our accomplishments: We approved transportation and economic stimulus packages and passed a budget that addresses a \$2.6 billion deficit without some of the earlier proposed cuts to our state's most vulnerable citizens. The budget also avoids a general tax increase at a time when many families are struggling to make ends meet.

The Legislature made sizeable investments in our schools, colleges and other public facilities, taking advantage of low interest rates to revitalize communities and grow thousands of new jobs. We crafted compromise reforms for our unemployment insurance and passed a business tax rate reduction for The Boeing Co. if — and only if — it agrees to construct its new 7E7 aircraft here in Washington.

Clearly, one of the most important legislative victories for our area was the passage of a transportation package. I am gratified that after a decade of wrangling, the Legislature finally had the momentum to approve a comprehensive plan in Olympia. It's balanced and includes funds for road improvements, the ferry system, commuter rail and public transit. These projects will help break the gridlock and boost our economy with thousands of construction jobs.

Inside this newsletter you'll find some of the most interesting results of my last voter survey and more information about the past session.

I look forward to seeing you around the district. Please keep in touch.

Sincerely,

Paull Shin
State Senator, 21st District

**Survey results are
on the back page.**

Occasionally, I send out a quick, informal newsletter via e-mail. It's an easy way for you to get the most current information about what's happening in Olympia. If you'd like to be added to the mailing list, please contact my legislative assistant John Tulloch by e-mail at tulloch_jo@leg.wa.gov or by phone in the district office at (425) 673-1393.



A balanced budget

The most profound debate of our regular and special sessions was what the blend of spending cuts and revenue increases should be to balance our budget. I brought four guiding principles to the debate. First, the education of our children is our highest priority, and we must do our best to maintain excellent K-12 and higher education systems. Second, we must protect vulnerable children and adults from deep budget cuts. Third, we must not damage our economy further with across the board tax hikes or steeper business taxes. Fourth, we must respect past votes of the people of Washington, the people whom we serve.

The budget that passed in the end is a split-it-right-down-the-middle compromise between the original Senate and House budgets. While it is far from perfect, it does not raise taxes. It also maintains our state's commitment to our most vulnerable citizens, who were targets of drastic cuts in earlier proposals:

- Medical assistance for 40,000 children in low-income families is maintained.
- Undocumented mothers will continue to be able to receive prenatal care for their children, who will be born U.S. citizens.

But these restorations weren't enough for me, so I could not vote for the final agreement. Some vulnerable adults will still lose health benefits and public assistance because of this budget.

Many of you indicated in the survey that education is your highest priority. I'm chagrined to report that larger classrooms and lower teacher pay will become a reality because the Legislature thumbed its nose at the voters by temporarily suspending two popular education initiatives, I-728 and I-732. College tuition will be harder to afford because of an up to 14 percent tuition increase during the next two years. When combined with the increases approved last year, tuition will rise 41 percent in four years.

Getting transportation moving

On a positive note, the Legislature approved a balanced \$4.2 billion transportation plan that will begin to address the large backlog of needed transportation improvements. I was proud to support this investment in our state's future, as well as the thousands of new jobs the plan creates. The package contains a list of the specific projects to be built during the next 10 years, including:

- Expanded HOV lanes on Interstate 5;
- Expanded ferry facilities at Edmonds and Mukilteo;
- Additional funding for Sounder rail service and track improvements; and
- Funding for car pools and van pools that help reduce traffic during rush hour.



These improvements are funded through a one-time 5-cent increase in the state gas tax, a 15 percent gross-weight fee increase for commercial trucks and a 0.3 percent sales tax on motor vehicles. Some 56 percent of

those who responded to my recent voter survey favored an increase in the gas tax to fix our critical infrastructure problems.

Before approving the package, the Legislature passed a series of accountability and performance audit measures that will protect the taxpayers' money and help ensure that we're getting the best value.

Special session: Boeing

Gov. Gary Locke called a special session to address the nationwide bidding war for where The Boeing Co. will construct its new 7E7 aircraft. Thousands of high-paying jobs are at stake — as is the long-term economic future of our state. By reducing Boeing's business tax rate only if it builds the 7E7 here, the Legislature kept Washington in the running with other states vying for this lucrative project. Given the climate of increased accountability in Olympia, we thought it was only appropriate to require Boeing to be accountable if they were going to be given such a large tax reduction.

Unemployment insurance

Washington has one of the most generous unemployment insurance systems in the nation, which is not a fact we should be ashamed of. But reforming this complex system became very important during the final days of the session, because doing so keeps our state in the running to land the final assembly site for the 7E7, as well as attracts new businesses to the state. Senate Democrats proposed measures that were much more compassionate to the unemployed; unfortunately, those measures were rejected.

Prescription drugs

The cost of prescription drugs is rising at double-digit rates. Fortunately, this session, we were finally able to reach an agreement on how to make prescription drugs more affordable. We passed a bill that:

- Creates a state-purchasing consortium that will enable state agencies that purchase drugs to identify preferred drugs and negotiate lower prices with drug companies;
- Develops a discount program for the disabled and people 50 or older who have incomes of less than \$36,000 (for a family of two);
- Directs Medicaid to seek a federal waiver as a first step toward creating a Medicaid-subsidized prescription drug program;
- Creates a pharmacy connection program that will help low-income people obtain no-cost or low-cost drugs; and
- Requires the state's Area Agencies on Aging to develop programs to educate seniors about how to safely use prescriptions.

Some 200,000 people in Washington have no prescription drug coverage and meet the income and age guidelines for the discount program.

Brightwater

My legislation to protect our communities from future King County projects made good headway this session, but fell a bit short. As many of



you know, King County has been considering building a sewage treatment plant in Snohomish County. I believe it is undemocratic for Snohomish County towns to have their land seized for sewage treatment plants or other facilities without having representation in the siting process. My bill (Senate Bill 5078), which would have allowed communities to complete their own local siting process before a King County facility is constructed, was approved in committee, but failed to pass the House and Senate. Rest assured, I'll continue to press my case on behalf of all the people of Snohomish County.

Supporting military families

The entire state is proud of the committed men and women of the armed services who have performed so professionally and successfully. The Legislature approved a bill (SB 5044), which I strongly supported, to allow deployed service personnel to break their housing leases without penalty. In the last few weeks of the session, I introduced legislation (SB 6071) that would have exempted service men and women from university tuition increases that occur during their deployment. My bill also would have protected state employees who serve in the reserves from cuts in their retirement pensions that occur when they are called to active duty. We must honor these men and women, not penalize them. I intend to reintroduce the bill next year.

Tourism

Given Washington's natural beauty, tourism is a tremendous opportunity for our state. Currently, this industry generates more than \$1.7 billion annually and supports more than 21,000 jobs. I pushed through legislation that directs our state's tourism office, part of the Office of Trade and Economic Development, to promote Washington as a tourism destination within the United States and around the world. To further this effort, the tourism office must work with the Department of Fish and Wildlife and private companies to market Washington as a destination for tourists and their dollars.



Legislative Issues Survey Results

More than 1,000 21st District residents returned my latest survey on issues debated by the Legislature. Your responses helped me better represent your opinions here in Olympia. While this survey is not a scientific poll, you may be interested in some of the most interesting results, which are included below.

How do you rank the following priorities of state government, from 1 (most important) to 5 (least important)?

- a) Education2.07
- b) Transportation2.67
- c) Public safety2.93
- d) Job creation/training . .3.41
- e) Environment3.43

In addition to cutting spending on K-12 education, the Legislature passed a significant tuition increase for students at colleges and universities during the next two years, which comes on top of another large increase passed last year. I see that as a tax increase on college students and their families, and I opposed that move.

Do you support expanded independent performance audits to review how effectively and efficiently agencies accomplish their missions?

Yes 74%

No 26%

The Legislature approved significant accountability legislation for our Department of Transportation. Other sweeping performance audit bills passed the Senate with my support, but died in the House. The issue will certainly come up again next session.

Do you support a legislative proposal to enact transportation accountability measures this year, approve a 5-cent gas tax increase and provide for a public vote in 2004 for an additional 4-cent gas tax increase?

Yes 56%


No 44%

We approved the statewide accountability measures and the 5-cent increase. Additional funding may be required for a Snohomish-King-Pierce regional transportation package; discussions are ongoing.

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